

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-09 IO-10 ISO-00 SCCT-01 AID-05 PC-01

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSC-05 PA-01

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P R 040851Z APR 75

FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3306

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA 429

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

CINCUSNAVEUR

COMNAVTELCOM

USCINCEUR

COMIDEASTFOR

CNAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

DIRNSA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 392

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y FOR ADDEEE.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, PFOR, ET, US

SUBJECT: ERITREA - THE INSURGENCY

1. THE ERITREAN INSURGENCY, WHICH BLAZED UP SO DRAMATICALLY

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TWO MONTHS AGO, NOW APPEARS TO HAVE LOST ITS IMPETUS. THERE HAVE

BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS FOR SEVERAL WEEKS. ANY NIGHTTIME FIRING NOW HEARD IN ASMARA EMANATES FROM ETHIOPIAN SECURITY FORCES PURSUING CURFEW BREAKERS OR SEARCHING THE CITY FOR INSURGENTS. RUMORS ABOUND TO THE EFFECT THAT THE ELF/PLF ARE PREPARING ANOTHER AND MAJOR ASSAULT ON ASMARA BUT THERE IS LITTLE OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE OF THIS. THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY PRESENTLY CONTROLS ASMARA AND AS MUCH OF THE COUNTRYSIDE AS IT CHOOSES TO OCCUPY IN FORCE AT ANY GIVEN TIME.

2. THE ATTACKS LAUNCHED BY THE ELF/PLF AGAINST ASMARA DURING FEBRUARY, WHILE PREEMPTIVE IN NATURE, APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN PRINCIPALLY DESIGNED TO CONFUSE AND DISORIENT THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY RATHER THAN ACTUALLY TO SEIZE THE CITY. INITIALLY THE ATTACKS, BELIEVED TO INVOLVE NO MORE THAN, THIRTY INSURGENTS AT ANY ONE TIME, WERE WILDLY SUCCESSFUL, THE MILITARY OVERREACTED,

THE CIVILIAN POPULATION PANICKED, THE FOREIGN POPULATION WAS EVACUATED, AND THE NORMAL LIFE OF THE CITY WAS SUSPENDED. TO THAT EXTENT, THE INITIAL INSURGENT EFFORT

WAS SUCCESSFUL.

3. AS OF THIS WRITING, ASMARA IS SLOWLY RETURNING TO SOME SEMBLANCE OF NORMALITY. SHOPS ARE OPEN, POWER AND WATER ARE ON, AND STAPLE FOODS ARE AVAILABLE, ALBEIT AT SOMEWHAT INFLATED PRICES. HOWEVER, INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES REMAIN CIRCUMSCRIBED BECAUSE OF SUPPLY DIFFICULTIES AND TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS. FEW RAW MATERIALS OR SPARE PARTS ENTER ASMARA, AND ONLY LIMITED FINISHED PRODUCTS ARE BEING SHIPPED OUT. THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR IS SUPPOSED TO BE DOING SOMETHING ABOUT THIS, BUT SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS AND THE ABSENCE OF MOST EXPATRIATE ENTREPRENEURS STILL APPEAR TO BE PREVENTING ANY REAL RETURN TO NORMAL.

4. THE COSNTRYSIDE AROUND ASMARA HAS BEEN DEVASTATED BY ETHIOPIAN MILITARY ACTION AIMED AT DEPRIVING THE INSURGENTS OF SANCTUARIES AND FOOD SUPPLIES. THE ELF/PLF EVIDENTLY SOUGHT TO MAINTAIN THE INITIATIVE TAKEN IN THE HIT-AND-RUN RAIDS ON ASMARA BY SIEZING AN IMPORTANT POPULATION CENTER. THE TARGET CHOSEN WAS KEREN. AFTER A MONTH LONG SERIES OF ENGAGEMENTS, INVOLVING LARGELY SMALL UNIT ACTIONS, THE EFFORT FAILED AND THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY RETAINS CONFIDENTIAL

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CONTROL OF KEREN. HOWEVER, THE ELF HAS SUCCEDED IN ESTABLISHING CONTROL OVER THE BULK OF THE WESTERN REGION OF ERITREA.

5. THE PRINCIPAL PROBLEM NOW FACING THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY IS CONTROL OF THE ROADS LEADING INTO AND OUT OF ASMARA. THE INSURGENTS CONTINUE TO MINE THE ROADS, STAGE AMBUSHES, AND PRECIPITATE FIREFIGHTS ON ANY AND ALL OF THESE ROADS. NEVERTHELESS, FOOD, FUEL AND SUPPLIES ARE COMING INTO THE CITY BOTH FROM MASSAWA AND

ADDIS ABABA UNDER MILITARY CONVOY. BASIC NEEDS ARE BEING MET ALTHOUGH NORMAL COMMERCE HAS NOT RESUMED.

6. THE TACTICS EMPLOYED BY THE INSURGENTS ARE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND. THE INITIAL HIT-AND-RUN RAIDS WERE BRILLIANTLY SUCCESSFUL BUT THERE HAS BEEN NO FOLLOW-UP A.THE INSURGENT LEADERSHIP IN THE FIELD APPEARS INEFFECTIVE AND DEVOID OF IMAGINATION.CONTINUING ETHIOPIAN MILITARY ACTIONS HAVE EVIDENTLY DIS-ORGANIZED THE INSURGENT FORCES AND DRIVEN THEM AWAY FROM ASMARA. IT IS TO BE ASSUMED THAT THE ELF/PLF ARE REGROUPING AND RESUPPLYING THEMSELVES AND IT MUST BE ASSUMED THAT THEY WILL SEEK TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE. THEY COULD RESUME THEIR RAIDS ON THE CITY, TURN TO TERRORIST TACTICS, ATTEMPT TO STRANGLE ASMARA BY INTERDICTING FUEL, POWER, AND WATER, OR EVEN SEEK CONVENTIONAL MILITARY ENGAGEMENTS. THERE ARE NO SIGNS THAT THEY WANT TO NEGOTIATE, AS YET.

7. TO DATE, NO ATTEMPTS HAVE BEEN MADE ON AMERICANS IN THE WAKE OF THE USG ARMS RESUPPLY DECISION. WE HAVE CONFLICTING REPORTS ON CURRENT ELF/PLF ATTITUDES VIS-A-VIS AMERICANS. ACCORDING TO ONE RELIABLE SOURCE, THE OLD POLICY OF AVOIDING ATTACKS ON AMERICANS IN ORDER NOT TO ALIENATE THE USG REMAINS IN EFFECT. ACCORDING TO ANOTHER MORE OR LESS RELIABLE SOURCE, A NEW POLICY DECISION WAS MADE AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL TO GO AFTER AMERICANS, BUT ON THE LOCAL LEVEL, THOSE CHARGED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY REFUSED TO ACCEPT THE DECISION AND HAVE DECIDED TO LEAVE US ALONE FOR THE REASONS GIVEN ABOVE. WE CAN ONLY WAIT AND SEE.

8. IN SUM, THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY HAS SO FAR CONTAINED THE INSURGENCY, BUT THE INSURGENTS HAVE BY NO MEANS EXHAUSTED THEIR CAPABILITY. THEY RETAIN WIDESPREAD POPULAR SUPPORT WHILE THE ETH-IOPIAN ARMY HAS SUCCEEDED IN ANTAGONIZING VIRTUALLY THE ENTIRE ERITREAN POPULATION. HOWEVER,UNLESS THE INSURGENTS STAGE SOME DETERMINED

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AND DRAMATIC ACTIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE, THE ODDS ARE THAT THE INSURGENCY WILL GRADUALLY REVERT TO THE RELATIVELY LOW LEVEL OF THE PAST 13 YEARS.
SHERRY

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